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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002312

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VOTING SIMULATION: YANKEES NO, RED SOX SI

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Acting Deputy
Chief of Mission, for Reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) The National Electoral Council (CNE) successfully conducted a voting simulation on July 18 to prepare for the August 15 presidential recall referendum. SBC, the consortium operating the new voting system, reported a 99.2 percent success rate with the 5,200 machines distributed throughout Venezuela. The voting simulation created live contingency planning session for SBC and served as a public information campaign for the new voting machines. CNE, GoV, and opposition leaders were satisfied with the results. The fingerprinting machines, however, have not been delivered and could become a technical and political issue on August 15.
End summary.

Voting Centers

[¶](#)2. (C) Poloff observed six voting centers throughout Caracas on July 18 with Gustavo Ruiz, Coordinadora Democratica (CD) representative to the National Electoral Council (CNE). All sites were open to the public on July 18 to encourage voters to become acquainted with the new machines and ask questions about the voting process. Poloff observed low participation in five of the six sites, however, CNE and political party officials did not consider voter turnout to be a major issue. Many of the sites did not have the requisite five election workers. Many centers poloff visited had only one or two voting center leaders, and some had none.

[¶](#)3. (C) Smartmatic or CANTV (part of the SBC consortium) representatives were present at half of the sites poloff visited during the voting simulation. These representatives set up the voting machine and assisted with technical difficulties. From an operational and technical perspective, all sites appeared to be working well. On August 15, there will be an SBC representative at every voting center to assist with technical and/or operational problems.

Voting Process

[¶](#)4. (C) One election worker explained to poloff the voting process for the August 15 presidential recall referendum from a CNE-provided guide. At the center's entrance, voting center members will have the Electoral Registry (REP) list of eligible voters for that particular center. If the person is not on the list, they cannot enter the center. Once registration is confirmed, the voter's fingerprints are taken to assure that they have not voted at another center. After the voter's registration and fingerprints are confirmed, they proceed to a table to present their cedula and dip their pinky in an ink jar and then move to the voting booth. After the vote is registered, the machine prints out a small piece of paper, to be folded by the person and placed in a box as the voter leaves. Regarding security, poloff observed two to five National Guard troops at every center.

[¶](#)5. (C) In the voting simulation organizers guided voters through the entire process, explained how the new voting machines worked, and allowed the voters to use them. Poloff observed no problems with the operation of the voting machines. Voters appeared to have sufficient time, the machine was easy to operate, and printed verification slip worked well. The simulation question, "Which of the following baseball teams do you prefer?" offered two options, Caracas (on the left, "No" side) and Magallanes (on the right, "Yes" side). This question was not without controversy. Caracas is considered the Venezuelan version of the New York Yankees and the team of the upper-class, opposition-aligned voters, while the Magallanes are the Boston Red Sox of the Venezuelan baseball world (and Chavez' team).

16. (C) On July 19, CNE directors reiterated their decision to not release the simulation results to avoid political spin. Pro-government newspaper Diario Vea, however, printed a front-page story on July 20 claiming that 400,000 people voted in the simulation and that the Magallanes received 60 percent of the vote compared to 40 percent by Caracas. Diario Vea claimed that the Magallanes vote was associated with the "No" vote and it was one more time that the opposition had been dealt a blow. The Diario Vea report is unsubstantiated and inaccurate because the "Caracas" option was in the same spot as the "No" and the "Magallanes" vote was in the "Si" spot.

Public Information Campaign

17. (C) Beyond reviewing technical issues, the voting simulation served as a public information campaign to allow voters to ask questions about the voting process, use the machines, and dispel rumors about the process. The CNE provided each center with a guide about the machines and the voting process. Representatives, either from the voting center or the SBC consortium, explained the process to voters who visited the sites. Voters were able to use the machines and familiarize themselves with the actual process. Voters also asked questions to the SBC and voting center representatives. Voters repeatedly asked about the secrecy of the vote, which prompted CNE President Francisco Carresquero to tell reporters, "There is no way to know how a citizen voted. The vote is absolutely secret."

18. (C) GoV and opposition media and leaders expressed their approval of the voting simulation. In addition, both sides have begun public information campaigns for the August 15 vote. GoV-supported newspaper Diario Vea printed an article on July 19 explaining the voting process. Venezolano de Television, the state television channel, is running CNE commercials that explain how to use the machine and reaffirm the secrecy and reliability of the voting machines. Felipe Mujica, Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) President and Coordinadora Democratica representative to the CNE, asserted that the simulation will dispel rumors about the technical aspects of the referendum. The Coordinadora delivered a detailed report to the CNE July 20 with its evaluation of the simulation, highlighting areas for improvement.

Possible Problems

19. (C) Possible problems still remain for the technical and operational aspects of August 15 presidential recall referendum. SBC reported that 99.2 percent of the voting machines functioned without problem. Of the 47 faulty machines, SBC asserted that most problems were due to the operator, not the machine. The voting simulation, however, did not include the use of the fingerprinting machines. Mujica told Charge July 20 that it appeared unlikely that the CNE could implement the untested fingerprint system. Opposition leaders expressed some minor concerns about the technical difficulties of the July 18 simulation, but their principal concern are the delays caused by the fingerprinting machines. Also, the Electoral Registry (REP) lists were not yet available to the voting centers.

Comment

110. (C) The July 18 voting simulation served its principal purpose: it helped identify faults and failures and helped many become familiar with the system. All have initially expressed satisfaction with the results. Nonetheless, questions remain. The addition of the fingerprinting machines and the update of the REP lists could create lengthy delays on August 15. The real purpose of the fingerprint

machines may be to insinuate that the government will be able to know how the people voted.
McFarland

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